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IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Applicant: Chhedi L. Verma et al.
Serial No: Art Unit: 2765
Filing Date:
Title: METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR PRESENTING PRICE
COMPARISON TO PROSPECTIVE BUYERS
Prior Application Examiner: Susanna Meinecke-Diaz
Attorney's Docket Number: FRB208

September 6, 2000

FRB208T3

TRANSMITTAL LETTER

Hon. Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks
Washington, D.C. 20231

SIR:

Transmitted herewith for filing is:

- <X> REQUEST FOR FILING A CONTINUATION APPLICATION UNDER 37 CFR 1.60 dated August 25, 2000
 - <X> Copy of the originally filed application (8 pages)
 - <X> Copy of the Inventor Declaration (3 pages)
 - (X) Enclosed is a check to cover the fee in the amount of \$345.00
 - (X) The applicant hereby petitions the Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks to extend the time for response to any Office Action outstanding in the above captioned matter as necessary to avoid abandonment of the application. Please charge my deposit account in the amount required to cover the cost of the extension. Any deficiency or overpayment should be charged or credited to the above account.
 - () Please charge my Deposit Account No. in the amount of \$..... A duplicate copy of this sheet is enclosed.
- A signature or signatures required for the above recited document(s) is (are) provided herebelow. Such signature(s) also provide(s) ratification for any required signature appearing to be defective in the above recited document(s).

Robert J. Ferb, 26 East Summit Street,
Somerville, N.J. 08876, (908)722-4043,
Reg. No. 28,536

Mailing Certification:

I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the United States Postal Service as ~~first class mail~~ in an envelope addressed to Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks, Washington, D.C. 20231, on 08 SEP 2000

Signature: Radoslaw Krajewski Date: 08 SEP 2000
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IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Applicant: Chhedi L. Verma et al.

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Title: METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR PRESENTING PRICE
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Prior Application Examiner: Susanna Meinecke-Diaz

Attorney's Docket Number: FRB208

August 25, 2000

FRB208P1

REQUEST FOR FILING A CONTINUATION APPLICATION
UNDER 37 CFR 1.60

Assistant Commissioner for Patents
Washington, D.C. 20231

SIR:

This is a request for filing a

<X> continuation application under 37 CFR 1.60
< > divisional application under 37 CFR 1.60

of pending prior Application Number 09/144,789 filed on September 1, 1998, entitled **METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR PRESENTING PRICE COMPARISON TO PROSPECTIVE BUYERS**

1. Enclosed is a copy of the latest inventor - signed prior application, including a copy of the oath or declaration showing the original signature or an indication it was signed. I hereby verify that the papers are a true copy of the latest signed prior application number 09/144,789, and further that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issuing thereon.

TOTAL CLAIMS	10	-	20	=	X 9 = \$
INDEPENDENT CLAIMS	2	-	3	=	X 39 = \$
MULTIPLE DEPENDENT CLAIMS				=	X 130 = \$
BASIC FEE					= \$ 345.00

TOTAL OF ABOVE CALCULATIONS =					\$ 345.00

2. ☒ A verified statement to establish small entity status under 37 CFR 1.9 and 1.27
☐ is enclosed
☒ was filed in prior application No. **09/144,789** and such status is still proper and desired (37 CFR 1.28(a)).
3. ☐ The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees which may be required under 37 CFR 1.16 and 1.17, or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account Number
A duplicate copy of this sheet is enclosed.
4. ☒ A check in the amount of **\$345.00** is enclosed.
5. ☐ Cancel in this application original claims of the prior application before calculating the filing fee. (At least one original independent claim must be retained for filing purposes.)
6. ☒ The inventor(s) of the invention being claimed in this application is (are): **Chhedi Lal Verma**
Mamta Ganesan
7. ☐ The application is being filed by less than all the inventors named in the prior application. In accordance with 37 CFR 1.60(b), the Commissioner is requested to delete the name(s) of the following person or persons who are not inventors of the invention being claimed in this application:
8. ☒ Amend the specification by inserting before the first line the sentence:
"This application is a ☒ continuation ☐ division of application number **09/144,789** filed on **September 1, 1998**, now pending."
9. ☐ New formal drawings are enclosed.
10. ☐ Priority of a foreign application serial number , filed on in the is claimed under 35 U.S.C. 119(a) - (d).

< > acknowledgement was made of a claim for foreign under 35 USC § 119(a)-(d) that all of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received; acknowledgement was included in the Office Action mailed on in prior application number....., filed

11.< > A preliminary amendment is enclosed.

12.< > The prior application is assigned of record to
.....

13.< > Also enclosed:

14.<X> The power of attorney in the prior application is to:
Robert J. Ferb (Reg. No. 28,536)

a.<X>The power of attorney appears in the original papers in the prior application.

b.< >Since the power does not appear in the original papers, a copy of the power in the prior application is enclosed.

c.<X>Address all future correspondence to: (May only be completed by applicant, or attorney or agent of record.)

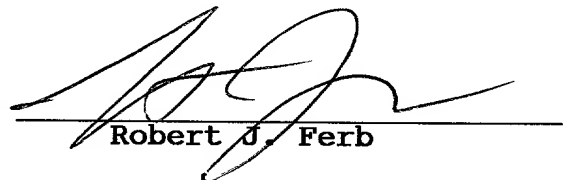
Name, address, telephone: Horst M. Kasper, 13 Forest Drive,
Warren, N.J.07059, Tel.(908)757-2839.

Attorney's docket Number: FRB209

Attorney's Reg. Number: 28,559

Date: 9-7-2000

Signature


Robert J. Ferb

() Inventor(s)

() Assignee of complete interest

(X) Attorney or agent of record

() Filed under 37 CFR §1.34(a)

Registration number if acting under 37 CFR 3.73(a)

PTO/SB/13(11-96) reqcon(FRB208(August 25, 2000(sn-vz

TITLE OF INVENTION

Method and apparatus for presenting price comparison to prospective buyers.

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED PUBLICATIONS

Not applicable

STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

Not applicable

REFERENCE TO A MICROFICHE APPENDIX

Not applicable

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is a method and apparatus for presenting price comparison to prospective buyers by enabling them to inspect a listing, or other visual or audible representation of plural items available for purchase.

Comparing prices and features of products offered by various merchants is a daunting task for prospective buyers because of the multitude of methods employed by merchants to communicate such information. Focus of the present invention is on products that are offered for sale in stores maintained by merchants which the prospective buyers may personally visit to see and/or touch and/or feel the product before making the purchase. Examples of such stores are Sears, Circuit City, Radio Shack, Macys etc. that stock products in various stores. These merchants utilize many different methods and media to communicate the prices and features information to the prospective buyers. One of the methods is to advertise prices and features of products offered for sale, by compiling them in a booklet or flyer to form a sales circular. This sales circular can then be mailed to prospective buyers using mailing lists. Another way is to send the sales circular as part of a newspaper either as an insert/attachment or as an advertisement. Yet another way is to use mass media advertising like TV, radio, or the Internet to communicate all or a part of the sales circular information to the prospective buyers. The sales circular may be part of a booklet published and distributed by an advertising company that displays prices and features for products offered by area merchants. Some merchants print catalogs, containing information on prices and features of products offered for sale, in addition to the above mentioned methods or by itself that can be mailed and/or picked up by the prospective buyers from the merchant stores. Many of these merchants claim to have the lowest prices for products and some even offer to beat the competitors price. Merchants also announce special sales events and distribute coupons that can be used to purchase products for a specific price and/or at a discount to the sales price.

Prospective buyers sometimes make personal visits to the stores maintained by the merchants to find out the prices for products.

This abundance of information requires a major effort to collect all data on prices and features of products offered for sale by the merchants. Collecting all such data is made more difficult for the following reasons:

- The merchants target their advertising to the area where their stores are located. For example, even for a small state like New Jersey (it is the 5th smallest state), Star Ledger has thirteen editions - one for each of the thirteen counties. Monmouth county edition of Sunday Star Ledger does not carry sales circular for Target but Middlesex county edition does. The reason for this is that Target has a store in Middlesex county but not in Monmouth county.
- Many merchants mail sales circulars to holders of store credit cards and the prospective buyers that do not carry a store credit card may not receive the sales circular for that store.
- Many merchants take people off mailing lists if no purchase is made for a pre-determined period of time.
- It's easy to miss advertisements on TV, radio, Internet, or in newspapers.
- Many merchants organize middle of the week sales that may be announced in daily newspapers and are missed by those who only subscribe to Sunday newspapers.
- Coupons can help bring the cost down but are not easy to find. Many merchants run advertisements on TV or radio but can distribute coupons only by direct mail or newspapers. Some merchants offer coupons on the World Wide Web requiring the prospective buyers to have a color printer and install special software on their computers to download and print coupons. An example of such a website is www.coolsavings.com. When buyers purchase products without the coupons, they end up paying more.

Once the prospective buyers collect all the information they could, they have to organize the data and focus on the product they wish to purchase. This requires still more time and effort. Finally, they have to do the price comparison taking into account all special promotions, coupons, rebates etc. Price comparison is more difficult when the manufactures offer rebates that must be mailed in. It is even more difficult when the manufactures offer rebates and a group of products must be purchased to receive the rebate.

Some merchants bait the prospective buyers by advertising a price for a specific product and then try to switch them to another product when the buyer reaches the store to purchase the product with the excuse that the advertised product is sold out (this is generally referred to as bait and switch.) Sometimes the product may be sold out and the store may offer a raincheck which means either the prospective buyer start the search again (if they really do need the product right away) or they come back to the store when the product is in stock again. This makes the shopping experience very frustrating.

Price and/or feature comparison for some of the products offered for purchase on the World Wide Web (WWW) is available on many WWW websites. The examples of such comparative data can be seen at www.compare.net, www.bottomdollar.com, www.top10guide.com, www.shoppingexplorer.com, www.shopfind.com, www.roboshopper.com, www.jango.com etc. However, these websites primarily provide comparison for products offered for sale on the WWW and thus provide help to prospective buyers that do on-line shopping. These websites do not contain comparison data on daily/weekly/monthly sale events advertised by merchants as described above that is the focus of this invention. Website at www.compare.net provides comparison of product features. Website at www.bottomdollar.com provides comparison for products available on the WWW. Website at www.top10guide.com provides top ten picks available online for a selection of products available on the WWW. Website at www.shoppingexplorer.com requires the user to load special software on the computer and searches websites of participating merchants. Website at www.shopfind.com searches only those sites that allow online purchase through a secure SSL-encrypted connection. Website at www.roboshopper.com claims to have the fastest way to find best values on the Web. Website at www.jango.com searches websites of online merchants on the WWW and allows placing an order online.

A majority of prospective buyers currently purchase products that are offered for sale in stores maintained by merchants which the prospective buyers visit to see and/or touch and/or feel the product before they make the purchase. These prospective buyers have to collect data from sales circulars, advertisements, catalogs etc. and rely on themselves to do their comparison shopping. What is desired is a central source that compares all such data for products offered by a plurality of merchants and can present the comparison information to dramatically reduce the effort and time required in doing such comparison.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention helps prospective buyers in shopping for products with the best prices and/or features. The present invention employs a computer system which is linked to databases containing information about products available for sale.

The present invention allows easy price comparison for products that are offered for sale in stores maintained by merchants which the prospective buyers may personally visit to see and/or touch and/or feel the product. The present invention removes all three barriers to price and feature comparison by providing all data, organizing the data to allow easy search for products, and comparing all information including special promotions, coupons, rebates etc. to present the products with the best prices. In addition, the present invention provides the following advantages:

- The presentation of comparison data may be for a number of top picks or all the records.

- The prospective buyers may choose to compare prices in a different geographical area than their town and/or county and/or state to find the merchant with the best price and/or features.
- Many stores offer a thirty day price protection which means if the same product is advertised for less within thirty days of the purchase, the buyer can get a price adjustment. The buyer may continue to check the prices for next thirty days to find out if the same product is advertised for less. This translates to a five fold increase in time and effort that can be potentially saved.
- Checking the store inventory before going to the store to pick up the product will cut down on bait and switch. If the store inventory is checked and the product is out of stock, the prospective buyer may decide to go to a different store or a different merchant or may decide to get a raincheck to buy the product at a later time. This cuts down on frustration and allows the prospective buyers to accomplish shopping in a much shorter period of time.

Further objects and advantages of our invention will become apparent from the ensuing description.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The data from the merchants is collected into databases that contain information about products including merchant name, product description and/or model number, sales price, coupons/rebates, and other details like regular price, colors etc. This information is changed based on availability of information from the merchants. The frequency of change is dependent on announcements of sales events and may be many times a day, daily, weekly, monthly etc. The data collection can be done by collecting information from all the methods used by the merchants to communicate prices and features information to the prospective buyers. The major source of such information are the sales circulars, advertisements, and catalogs. This information may be collected directly from the merchants or the newspapers in printed or electronic format. The data is stored on storage devices that are part of a single computer system or a network of multiple computer systems.

The data is searched based on a search key. The search key is either explicitly inputted or implicitly derived. The search key will contain at least one of a plurality of attributes. These attributes may be a geographical region, product name, product category, model number, product description, price, product features, brand name etc. These set of attributes are based on the product and may vary from product to product. For example, VCRs always have model numbers while dining tables seldom do. The geographical region may be defined by postal code, town, county, or state either by itself or in a combination that defines one of the attributes of the search key.

The data is retrieved from the database based on the search key and arranged in a sorted order to show comparison. The default order for sort is based on price and the prospective buyer may be provided with the option to sort based on other attributes such as merchant name, product name, model number etc. Each

comparison record provides merchant name and details on the product. The input and output interfaces to the apparatus are provided via the World Wide Web, Email, voice telephony, or video telephony.

In a preferred embodiment, data for all merchants offering a specific product (e.g. VCR) in a specific state (e.g. New Jersey) is collected in a database. This data comprises the merchant name, product description, sales price, coupons, and rebates as applicable. This data is stored in a database on a storage device. The prospective buyer is provided access to this apparatus via the World Wide Web through a Browser interface and is presented with options to choose a state and a product. Once the state and product are chosen, the data is retrieved and the prospective buyer is presented with a listing of merchants that offer the product for sale in chosen state. The records in this listing are sorted in ascending order based on sales price and the prospective buyer has the option to sort based on merchant name.

In an alternative embodiment, the data is so organized as to map to a unique address for a geographical area-product combination and a search key is not required to search the data. Thus, the prospective buyers are immediately presented with the comparison data for the unique geographical area-product pair upon connecting to the unique address. For example, a website can be created on the World Wide Web called www.njvcr.com. When the prospective buyers connect to this site using a Browser, they are presented with the comparison data for VCRs that are on sale in New Jersey.

The present invention can be enhanced by checking the inventory at a merchant store local to the prospective buyer to determine availability of the product. In addition, the prospective buyer may be allowed to reserve the product that can be picked up at a local merchant store. This may be further enhanced by inputting a registration token or credit card number that is accepted by the merchant to guarantee the purchase.

Although several embodiments of the present invention has been described above, it would be readily understood by those having ordinary skill in the art that many modifications are possible in the described embodiments without departing from the teachings of the present invention. All such modifications are intended to be encompassed by the claimed invention. For instance, the present invention may be used to present comparison for services offered by merchants. The present invention may also be used to provide features comparison either by itself or in association with the price comparison.

CLAIMS

What we claim as our invention is:

1. A method for using a computer to present price comparison to a prospective buyer for products offered for sale by a plurality of merchants, said merchants stocking said products in stores that said prospective buyer may personally visit to see and/or touch and/or feel said products, said method comprising:
 - collecting information from a plurality of said merchants that comprises data on said products including price
 - storing said data into at least one of a plurality of databases
 - presenting at least one of a plurality of records that shows said comparison to said prospective buyer.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein a search key is used for retrieving the data from said databases.
3. The method of claim 1, further comprising checking said store inventory of said merchant to determine the availability of said product.
4. The method of claim 1, further comprising reserving at least one of a plurality of said products that can be picked up later at said merchant store.
5. The method of claim 1, further comprising accepting a credit card number from said prospective buyer to purchase said product.
6. An apparatus for presenting price comparison to a prospective buyer for products offered for sale by a plurality of merchants, said merchants stocking said products in stores that said prospective buyer may personally visit to see and/or touch and/or feel said products, comprising:
 - at least one of a plurality of storage devices
 - at least one of a plurality of processors connected to said storage devices
 - said storage devices storing
 - information from a plurality of said merchants that comprises data on said products including price
 - a program for controlling said processor
 - said processor operative with said program to present at least one of a plurality of records that shows said comparison to said prospective buyer.
7. The apparatus of claim 6, in which said processor is further operative with said program to use a search key to retrieve said data from said storage devices.

8. The apparatus of claim 6, in which said processor is further operative with said program to check said store inventory of said merchant to determine the availability of said product.
9. The apparatus of claim 6, in which said processor is further operative with said program to reserve at least one of a plurality of said products that can be picked up later at said merchant store.
10. The apparatus of claim 6, in which said processor is further operative with said program to receive a credit card number from said prospective buyer to purchase said product.

ABSTARCT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A method and apparatus designed to facilitate price comparison for products, offered by a plurality of merchants, that are stocked by the merchants in stores that the prospective buyers may personally visit to see and/or touch and/or feel the products. The data from various merchants, comprising details on products including price, is collected into a computer system. A subset of the data is retrieved and organized to present a comparison to the prospective buyers. The method and apparatus of the present invention have applications on the World Wide Web as well as conventional communications systems such as voice telephony.

Please type a plus sign (+) inside this box → ☐

PTO/SB/01 (12-97)

Approved for use through 9/30/00. OMB 0651-0032

Patent and Trademark Office; U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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DECLARATION FOR UTILITY OR DESIGN PATENT APPLICATION (37 CFR 1.63) <input type="checkbox"/> Declaration Submitted with Initial Filing OR <input type="checkbox"/> Declaration Submitted after Initial Filing (surcharge (37 CFR 1.16 (e)) required)	Attorney Docket Number	
	First Named Inventor	Chhedi L. Verma
	COMPLETE IF KNOWN	
	Application Number	/
	Filing Date	
	Group Art Unit	
	Examiner Name	

As a below named inventor, I hereby declare that:

My residence, post office address, and citizenship are as stated below next to my name.

I believe I am the original, first and sole inventor (if only one name is listed below) or an original, first and joint inventor (if plural names are listed below) of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled:

Method and apparatus for presenting price comparison to prospective buyers.

☒ the specification of which (Title of the Invention)

☐ is attached hereto
OR

☐ was filed on (MM/DD/YYYY) as United States Application Number or PCT International

Application Number and was amended on (MM/DD/YYYY) (if applicable)

I hereby state that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above identified specification, including the claims, as amended by any amendment specifically referred to above.

I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability as defined in 37 CFR 1.56.

I hereby claim foreign priority benefits under 35 U.S.C. 119(a)-(d) or 365(b) of any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate, or 365(a) of any PCT international application which designated at least one country other than the United States of America, listed below and have also identified below, by checking the box, any foreign application for patent or inventor's certificate, or of any PCT international application having a filing date before that of the application on which priority is claimed.

Prior Foreign Application Number(s)	Country	Foreign Filing Date (MM/DD/YYYY)	Priority Not Claimed	Certified Copy Attached?	
				YES	NO
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

☐ Additional foreign application numbers are listed on a supplemental priority data sheet PTO/SB/02B attached hereto.

I hereby claim the benefit under 35 U.S.C. 119(e) of any United States provisional application(s) listed below.

Application Number(s)	Filing Date (MM/DD/YYYY)	<input type="checkbox"/> Additional provisional application numbers are listed on a supplemental priority data sheet PTO/SB/02B attached hereto.

[Page 1 of 2]

Burden Hour Statement: This form is estimated to take 0.4 hours to complete. Time will vary depending upon the needs of the individual case. Any comments on the amount of time you are required to complete this form should be sent to the Chief Information Officer, Patent and Trademark Office, Washington, DC 20231. DO NOT SEND FEES OR COMPLETED FORMS TO THIS ADDRESS. SEND TO: Assistant Commissioner for Patents, Washington, DC 20231.

Please type a plus sign (+) inside this box → ☐

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Patent and Trademark Office, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless it contains a valid OMB control number.

DECLARATION — Utility or Design Patent Application

I hereby claim the benefit under 35 U.S.C. 120 of any United States application(s), or 385(c) of any PCT International application designating the United States of America, listed below and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of this application is not disclosed in the prior United States or PCT International application in the manner provided by the first paragraph of 35 U.S.C. 112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability as defined in 37 CFR 1.56 which became available between the filing date of the prior application and the national or PCT International filing date of this application.

U.S. Parent Application or PCT Parent Number	Parent Filing Date (MM/DD/YYYY)	Parent Patent Number (if applicable)

☐ Additional U.S. or PCT international application numbers are listed on a supplemental priority data sheet PTO/SB/02B attached hereto.

As a named inventor, I hereby appoint the following registered practitioner(s) to prosecute this application and to transact all business in the Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith:

<input type="checkbox"/> Customer Number		<input type="checkbox"/> Registered practitioner(s) name/registration number listed below	
OR		Place Customer Number Bar Code Label here	
Name	Registration Number	Name	Registration Number

☐ Additional registered practitioner(s) named on supplemental Registered Practitioner Information sheet PTO/SB/02C attached hereto.

Direct all correspondence to: ☐ Customer Number or Bar Code Label ☐ Correspondence address below

Name	Chhedi L Verma				
Address	8909 Texas Sun Drive				
Address					
City	Austin	State	TX	ZIP	78748
Country	USA	Telephone	(512)282-6124	Fax	(512)282-6124

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under 18 U.S.C. 1001 and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

Name of Sole or First Inventor:		<input type="checkbox"/> A petition has been filed for this unsigned inventor			
Given Name (first and middle (if any))			Family Name or Surname		
Chhedi Lal			Verma		
Inventor's Signature	Sa				Date
					09/01/1992
Residence: City	Austin	State	TX	Country	USA
				Citizenship	USA
Post Office Address	8909 Texas Sun Drive				
Post Office Address					
City	Austin	State	TX	ZIP	78748
				Country	USA

☒ Additional inventors are being named on the 1 supplemental Additional Inventor(s) sheet(s) PTO/SB/02A attached hereto

